

# Ulrike Königshofer

## The See-Through Machine

Andreas Spiegl

If you wanted to phrase the title of Ulrike Königshofer's work somewhat differently, one option would be to understand the so-called *Durchblickapparat* (See-Through Machine) as an apparatus through which one can peer to look at something else. Otherwise, you could understand 'seeing through' more colloquially in the sense of 'detecting the true nature of something'—even if it is the apparatus itself that you 'see through'. In the first instance, talk of an optical instrument, and a spatial ordering of the gaze around corners, refers to the periscope. With the latter, the device directs the gaze towards itself—meaning both the apparatus and vision itself become the object of scrutiny: a kind of seeing that sees itself, a reflexive seeing that reflects seeing, not unlike autoscopy, which is tied to the perception of the double—analogue to creating a 'doppelganger of seeing'. The decision as to which of the two options will be the deciding one should not be left undecided, but settled with a reference to both: the 'see-through' machine is indebted to both the periscopic instrument and the doppelganger of sight that sees itself. Peering through the peephole, it is as if you could see straight through the opposite wall of the room you have just entered, could look right through it without ever leaving the space. The space is periscopically circumvented; the path that your line of sight has to travel in order to penetrate it visually is obscured. The only thing hidden is the circuitous path of the visual axis that negates the space. At the same time, sight understands that it cannot be seeing what it is seeing. The gaze is reflected in the impossibility of the seen; that sight is delivering an image that does not match the space, one that negates the separation between inside and outside. 'Optically correct' sight is inconsistent with the ability to see around the corner. Right away, the picture you make for yourself and the one that you see are two different things: you understand what you can't see and, at the same time, that you are seeing it. You know that there is no double, no doppelganger, and yet you see it—sight—disappearing around the corner to turn around again, to wave at seeing. 'Seeing through' sees through itself, gets carried away in looking.

As in other works, Ulrike Königshofer favours simple arrangements—be it the gears that turn or mirrors that direct the line of sight—to install a mechanism of the apparent. You 'see through' its workings, so that your attention is directed precisely to the divergence between what is visible or apparent and that which reveals itself. The comprehensibility of one is reflected in the withdrawal of the other. She draws on a mechanism that has withdrawn from the digital and binary processes of our time, thus negating even the hope of ever being able to understand its workings: a glimpse of a fibre optic cable is blind to the impulses it contains. The gaze directed at a computer monitor is of a constant nature, attuned to a reading of the

visual, limited to the recognition and deciphering of that which is seen. The aesthetics of the mechanical in Königshofer's works does not fit in with the premises of contemporary technology, not even in retrospective perspectives of a critique of progress. The act of seeing actively demanded in her work—to see what cannot be seen and to 'see through' that fact—insists on the here and now, on a present that regards seeing itself as something outmoded. The history of mechanics and physiology Königshofer refers to in the 19<sup>th</sup> century proclaimed that the tie between perception and reality was torn, and that perception can only perceive what it itself produces as a perception. Seeing itself appears as an obsolete, perceptual technology—a relic, a residue soon to know sight only as a modality from the past. And understanding—'seeing through'—vision from this perspective also means exposing it, putting it on display, wrenching it from its context as a mysterious exhibition object, as the legacy of a foreign culture. The divergence between sight and insight, not being able to see, alienates—sees the alienating power intrinsic to vision itself. It detaches from the subject that watches it watching, sees it seeing its sight disappear around the corner.

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